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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.



VALLAURIS AND ITS ALLIES.

By COSMO MONKHOUSE.

CLASSICAL pottery has not had so much influence on that of the modern world as might have been expected from its singular beauty. One of many reasons for this is perhaps sufficient: that the vases of Greece and Etruria for the most part remained undiscovered in the bowels of the earth at the period of the Renaissance. It is true that we find references

to fictile vases as belonging to a few great collections; that of the Medici, for instance, contained more than one. But the great finds of antique pottery belong to comparatively recent times. Buried for centuries in the tombs of old-world Greece and Italy, they were not recovered until inferior styles had taken too strong a root to be easily disturbed. Some of the old shapes, indeed, never died—that of the amphora being, perhaps, the most remarkable instance of survival. But the majority—and these the most distinguished by their elegant proportions and pure lines—may be said to have perished with antique civilization. Now we all know these beautiful forms, and scarcely less beautiful names—*cenoches*, *aryballos*, *lechyus*, and the rest.

As in sculpture, so in pottery, it was for the Greeks to reach the perfection of form. Perfect also, in its way, was their style of decoration: chaste, severe; not regardless of color, but relegating it to a place subsidiary. Modern pottery has, on the other hand, always given the first place to color. The classical motives of Italian majolica came, not direct from ancient art, but filtered through the designs of modern painters. Its conventional ornaments were largely arabesque; and where vases were made on ancient patterns, the models were Roman rather than Greek, and, moreover, were taken from stone and marble, and not from pottery. Even in later periods—that for instance of the semi-classical revival under the First Empire in France—the inspiration was at best impure; and our own Wedgwood may be said to have been the first modern potter who achieved anything like a restoration of the old art in its severe beauty of form. He

Phillips', in Oxford Street, you may find a good many of them at Messrs. Watherston's, in Pall Mall.

If reasons be asked for this apparent blindness of the people to the beauty of classical form in pottery, again it may be said that one will be enough. The influence of Oriental pottery, especially porcelain, was supreme. That its power should be incontestible at the tea board is not to be wondered at; but in other places it won and held its position by the marvellous beauty of its color. If color and form had had a fair start, it is probable that color would have won; but in the revival of ceramic art in the last century, color had, comparatively speaking, all its own way. China and Japan furnished the models of transparent paste and brilliant hues, which all Europe set to work to imitate. Dead Greece, with its exquisite shapes, was ignored. Not that the forms of the extreme East are to be despised; they have a quaintness and dignity—and sometimes a beauty—of their own. But (speaking broadly) of the two special delights which baked clay is capable of embodying—the delights of form and color—the palm for form must be given to Greece, and the palm for color to China.

Broadly speaking, too, the combination of these two qualities in a high degree has been left to our own days. We have not yet succeeded, it is true, in covering the pure shapes of the Greek potter with hues as brilliant and beautiful as those which once issued from the kilns of China. One of the most successful and enterprising of modern *keramists* has, however, approached as near to it as is possible in *factice*. This is M. Clément Massier, of Vallauris. If he cannot attain the splendor of the Imperial Yellow, or the pellucid loveliness of Agate Blue, he can coat his elegant vases with a fine Peacock tint, a rich dark original red, and many other striking and peculiar colors; he has a true artistic feeling for purity of form. He does not, as will be seen from our illustrations, confine himself to classical models; but he is always fastidious in the beauty of his lines and the harmony of his proportions. Whether he derive his inspiration from the "biberon" of Southern Europe, or an owl-headed vase from Troy, or the jars and bottles of the East, he turns out nothing which is coarse or ungainly; so that even when he is most modern or most Oriental, his work is regulated by that fine sense of measure which is the basis of classical art.

M. Massier may be said to have founded not only a new industry for his own workmen, but that school of modern pottery which relies for attraction on simple shapes covered with simple colors. In England several manufactures, aiming at similar effects, have started up of recent years; and to the existing list additions may be expected. Two of these, Dunmore and Linthorpe, have achieved no little fame by working mainly in this



VALLAURIS—SIMPLE SHAPES AND SIMPLE COLORS.

succeeded not only in reproduction, but to a certain extent in reconciling the ancient spirit to modern uses. This his treatment of that most unclassical vessel the teapot is enough to prove.

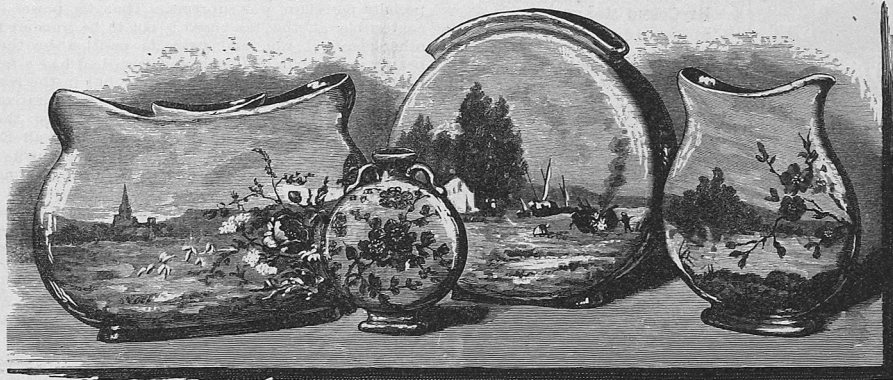
For cups and saucers, sugar basins and slop bowls, some easily adaptable classic forms may be found; you may empty dregs into a small *crater*, and drink from a *cyathus*. But the teapot, with its cover, handle and spout, has no kinship with classical art. Nevertheless, Wedgwood's teapots, especially those in black "basalt" and "jasper," were severely beautiful in shape. It may be said that if the Greeks had drunk tea they would have brewed it in vessels not unlike to these. Though the style which Wedgwood introduced so successfully died out like an exotic—never taking strong root in popular taste—the shapes he designed for his tea equipages are even now used as models for the silversmith; and if you may seek them in vain in Messrs.

direction; while at Gateshead, Leeds, and other places, potteries have added such ware to their staple manufactures. At a recent exhibition in the room of the Society of Arts there was a striking display of the more recent productions of the Linthorpe factory, mainly Oriental in character. Though not so crude and gaudy as the startling pots of Messrs. Maw, the Linthorpe coloring did not err on the side of sobriety or amenity. The ware, however, presented many novel effects and rich combinations, and the Linthorpe glaze is not exceeded in brilliancy even by that of Vallauris. Vases large and curious in shape, and some of great beauty, come from these works, and the experiments being made there—in splashing vases with glazes of different colors—seem likely to produce enduring results. There is, however, nothing which needs more art than the employment of accident in the service of beauty; and the running of one glaze over another has to be very dexterously managed to be pleasant to the eye.

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In many of the Linthorpe vessels the contrasts of colors are too strong, and the drip of the liquid is too apparent. The more modest Dunmore ware is generally good in shape and quiet in color, and is not easily distinguished from early Vallauris.

must to a certain extent be his own master. Much modern faience, pretty enough to look at, will not hold water; the clay is porous, the glaze cracks into a thousand minute fissures. This was once the case with Vallauris. Only the other day I saw a



VALLAURIS—LANDSCAPE DECORATIONS.

Nevertheless, without wishing to disparage any of the efforts of English keramists, it seems certain that in this particular branch of pottery, M. Clément Massier is supreme both in taste and skill.

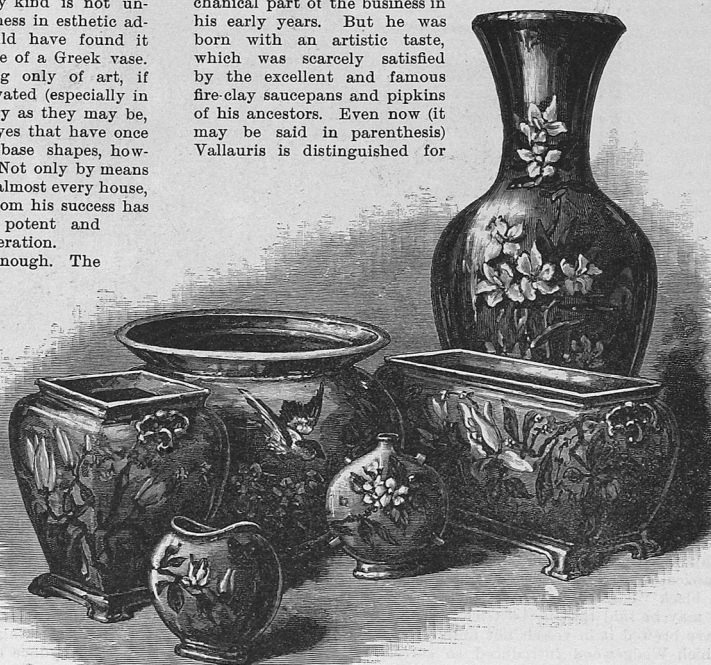
He is also its originator. Though beautiful shapes and colors existed in pottery before his day, he was the first in Europe to bring them within the reach of the poor. Now no cottager who has a sixpence to "bless himself with" need be without the benediction of a vase for his flowers which is not only pretty in color but comely in shape; and if those who are richer load their mantelpieces with ugly "chimney ornaments," the fault is wholly theirs.

It is not always true that pretty things are as cheap as ugly ones; for some beautiful materials are costly, and the production of some kinds of beauty demands expensive labor. But the saying really holds good in regard to simple pottery; for clay is cheap and production easy. M. Massier may well be proud of his share in bringing this result about. It is something to have given everybody an opportunity of possessing objects of pure and simple beauty. Ridiculous as he seemed, the young man in *Punch* who despaired of living up to his teapot was not altogether to be laughed at. If there is no moral property in beautiful color, the admiration of perfection of any kind is not unworthy. Of course there are degrees of nobleness in esthetic admiration, and the young man in *Punch* would have found it still harder to live up to the perfect shape of a Greek vase. Putting morality aside, however, and thinking only of art, if there is one faculty that requires to be cultivated (especially in England) it is the sense of form. Elementary as they may be, the lessons of Vallauris are good ones. Eyes that have once learnt them will not easily be satisfied with base shapes, however lavishly bedaubed with color and gold. Not only by means of his own productions, which penetrate into almost every house, but through those of other manufacturers whom his success has moved to rivalry, M. Massier will exert a potent and wholesome influence on the culture of his generation.

Now that the way is open, it seems easy enough. The ordinary soft pottery produced by every nation has only to be thrown or molded into beautiful shapes, and covered with some pleasant color and a fine glaze, and the thing is done. Usefulness and beauty are mated. Unfortunately, it is not so easy as it looks. There is no ceramic college in which the secrets of the potter's art—the mixture of the clays, the composition of the glazes, the certain production of required colors—can be learnt. Will M. Deck tell you how to produce his Sang-de-Bœuf? will even M. Massier yield the secret of his Peacock-Blue? How does M. Mallet contrive his wonderful pictures of tropical scenery, with their glowing hues and brilliant golden lights? Even in such comparatively simple work as that which at present concerns us, it is scarcely at once that any potter gets satisfactory results. His craft is one in which everybody

little vase made by another famous French potter, and cleverly painted with two chickens. I congratulated the purchaser; it was not cheap, but it was pretty. A rose and some water seemed harmless things enough, but next morning the little vase was a wreck. Though glazed inside and out, the water had permeated to the chickens, and they had "scaled off." Even in ordinary lead-glazed soft pottery—the class to which the wares of Vallauris, Dunmore and Linthorpe belong—it is necessary to find (1) a clay or mixture of clays that will become hard and unporous at a heat low in comparison with that needed for stoneware or porcelain; and (2) a glaze that will form a perfect union with the body. As to the colors, whether they be paint or enamel, applied under the glaze or mixed with the glaze itself, the difficulties of manipulation are legion; and no potter can arrive at any certainty without prolonged experiments and many failures. Great as has been the advance in the science of ceramics during the last quarter of a century, there is still no royal road to success in it.

The career of the Vallauris potter has—for one of his calling—been singularly free from reverses and disappointment. His father and grandfather—he writes me—were potters both; so that he was familiar with the mechanical part of the business in his early years. But he was born with an artistic taste, which was scarcely satisfied by the excellent and famous fire-clay saucepans and pipkins of his ancestors. Even now (it may be said in parenthesis) Vallauris is distinguished for



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the first rate quality of its culinary ware. It may be added that though the existing M. Clément Massier was the first of his family to decorate the drawing-room with objects of beauty, his father advanced beyond the kitchen. Without abandoning his *marmites* and *casseroles*, he began to make vases, cornices and balustrades to ornament the numerous villas which some five and thirty years ago were being built round the beautiful bay of Cannes. The new manufacture demanded new clay, and the native earth which had supplied the Romans centuries before with material for their lamps and amphoræ was now molded and baked into decorations for the residence of an ex-Chancellor of England. The genesis of the producer and the consumer seems to have been contemporaneous. M. Massier was ready for Lord Brougham, and Lord Brougham for M. Massier. The famous Scotchman not only built the first villa at Cannes, but was also the first patron of M. Massier's new industry. It thrived prodigiously, and no doubt the taste and enterprise of the father stimulated the artistic talent of the son.

When about fifteen Clément grew weary of balustrades and cornices. He had become acquainted with classical art, and was eager to imitate the forms of old Roman pottery. Whether or no there were kilns in Roman Vallauris it is impossible to say; for though it existed in the eleventh century, nearly every vestige of it was destroyed about the fourteenth. At all events, the young potter had seen specimens of the ancient ware, which had been dug up in the fields; and a friend of his, the old Abbé Alliez, furnished him with models for his first essays. The Abbé had written a book—a history of the ancient monastery of Lérins—which young Massier helped to transcribe for the press. In return the priest taught him something of history, and lent him drawings of antique vases. He also made drawings for himself of all such objects as he came across; so that about 1860 he had quite a gallery of designs, and was in a position to commence a little private Renaissance. Chance—in the person of an Italian workman, who stayed some years with the Massiers—assisted him greatly. From him he learnt carving and modeling, as well as the composition of some enamels, the history of Italian ceramics, and the Italian language. Perhaps, however, his greatest fortune was the father who encouraged his efforts, and gave them absolute liberty. The little vases which the boy made soon attracted attention, and he was wisely left to find customers for his own wares. In this

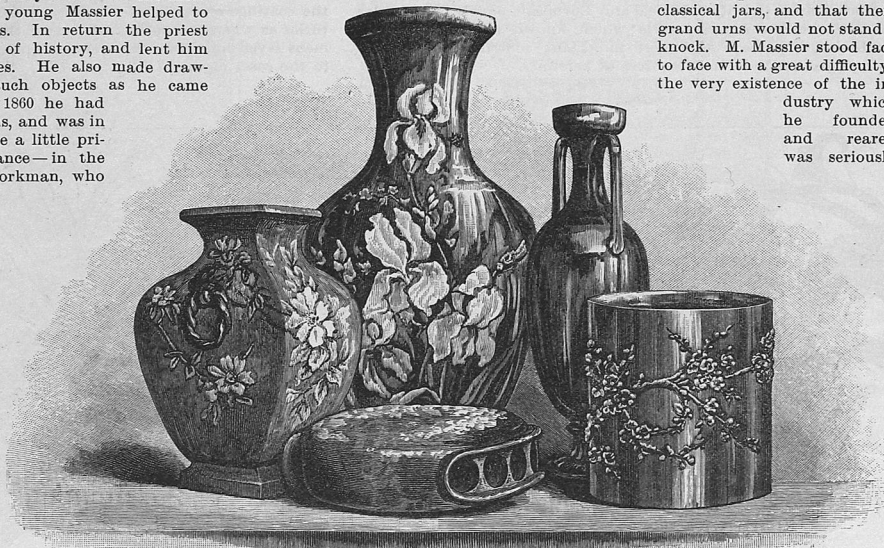
way he built up a connection of his own, and found an opportunity of entering into personal communication with men of learning and taste. At sixteen he numbered many such men amongst his friends and encouragers, nor did he fail to learn something from them all. That he profited much by his varied and persistent studies is evident, for in 1861 he succeeded in producing a Sea-Blue enamel, with which he covered his vases. Purity of shape he had already achieved, and in those days its combination with a beautiful new color was a triumph of originality. The success which might not have attended the production of mere beauty was assured by its conjunction with novelty. The circle of young Massier's customers widened to a public. He woke up one morning to find himself not only an intelligent pioneer, but the founder of a new industry.

He had many clients among the English residents, but the artists who frequented Cannes were not the last to discover and appreciate the beauty of his work. Among them two deserve

special mention as the earliest to encourage his talent and assist in its development. One of these was the painter Henri Bonney. From him Clément Massier received lessons in design, and learnt to understand what is meant by purity of line. The other was the late Alexander Munro, the sculptor, whose drawings, casts and pottery were placed at his disposal for study and imitation. M. Massier did not send any of his wares to the Paris International Exhibition of 1867; he did what was perhaps better—he went and saw how little he knew. On his return he set to work with renewed energy to discover certain colors he had seen and admired there. After some trouble he succeeded in adding a yellow, a dark blue, and an olive green to his enamels. His next impulse was received from a visit he paid to Italy in 1872, where he collected ancient vases and cups, which he reproduced. Hitherto, he had confined his efforts to small pieces; now he began to make large ones for the decoration of halls and vestibules. Success again attended him, and in two years the number of his workmen had increased to twenty.

He is now sole proprietor and director of the most important of the potteries at Vallauris, and employs from a hundred and fifty to two hundred hands. Such a progress made in eight years is astonishing, and could not have been attained without a complete revolution in his system of manufacture. He had gone on steadily; but his advance seemed likely to come to a sudden stop. His small vases were pretty, but they would not hold water, while the large ones were fragile exceedingly. The novelty had partly worn out, and the public had begun to find that they could not put flowers in their classical jars, and that their grand urns would not stand a knock. M. Massier stood face to face with a great difficulty; the very existence of the industry which

he founded
and reared
was seriously



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threatened. It was not a little change that was needed; everything was wrong—bad paste, soft glaze, impotent firing. To commence *de novo*, to spend time and money in fresh experiments while his old business was decaying, to keep the ship afloat with a leak forward and aft—this was what he had to do. Of course he did it, or this article would never have been written.

But it was not done in a day, nor without a severe crisis. To use his own words, "J'allai à deux doigts de ma perte." That he was earnest and industrious goes without saying; but for a potter he was not unfortunate, for the clay he wanted he found not far away. Nevertheless, the discovery took time and money, and when it was made he was not at the end of his troubles, for the new earth would not marry with the old glaze. Fresh experiments resulting in fresh discoveries produced the required *email-couverte*; and in 1877 M. Massier was able to produce work satisfactory from a commercial as well as an artistic point of view. In other words, his ware was useful and durable, as well as fine in shape and beautiful in hue. To his colors a very notable addition was made before 1878, after some years of experiment. This was a Peacock-Blue, deep and soft, almost identical with that found on Persian falenae. It was no doubt partly to this discovery that M. Massier owed his great success at the Paris Exhibition of 1878. It produced a small sensation amongst artists. Not only M. Gérôme, who had suggested the effort, but many others, including MM. Bonnat, Cabanel, Cot and Jules Lefebvre, wrote their congratulations. Even amongst his fellow-laborers one at least was found to add his voice to the chorus of praise. This was none other than M. Deck, one of the most famous of modern keramists; not less noted for the success of his researches than the perfection and taste of his manufactures, the discoverer of Sang-de-Bœuf and Underglaze-Gold, he did not fail to greet the appearance of the new color with a generous cheer.

Such artistic and professional appreciation was, however, by no means confined to the potter's coloring, but extended to his shapes and taste and theory of art. The silver medal at Paris in 1878, and diplomas of honor at Marseilles in 1879, and Tours in 1881, were scarcely so much prized as the warm recognition he had already received from his peers. Commercial success has not tended to relax his scientific and artistic efforts. Quite recently they have yielded another color to his choice palette, scarcely inferior in beauty and importance to his Peacock-Blue. This is a red, something between beetroot and crimson, a color at once rich and transparent, admirably suited for large vases for the garden and the hall, to light up dark corners and warm cold spaces. I may add here that M. Massier still continues the manufacture of architectural ornaments in terra-cotta, but the culinary utensils were given up in 1860.

Our illustrations, which are taken from specimens lent by Messrs. Howell and James, show throughout careful attention to beauty of form. The first is of vases covered with a single color, in which not only beauty but simplicity of shape is achieved. In the second the vases have been specially designed for the exhibition of pictures to be painted on the sides. The shapes of the vases, as such, is sacrificed to a certain extent to the decoration, but the compromise is effected with some feeling for grace and real purity of line. In the other three are figured vases of various shapes, Oriental, classical and European, mostly decorated in that modern impasto style which, known by the name of Barbotine, is perhaps the most important contribution which Europe has made to the resources of ceramics.

JAPANESE LACQUER.

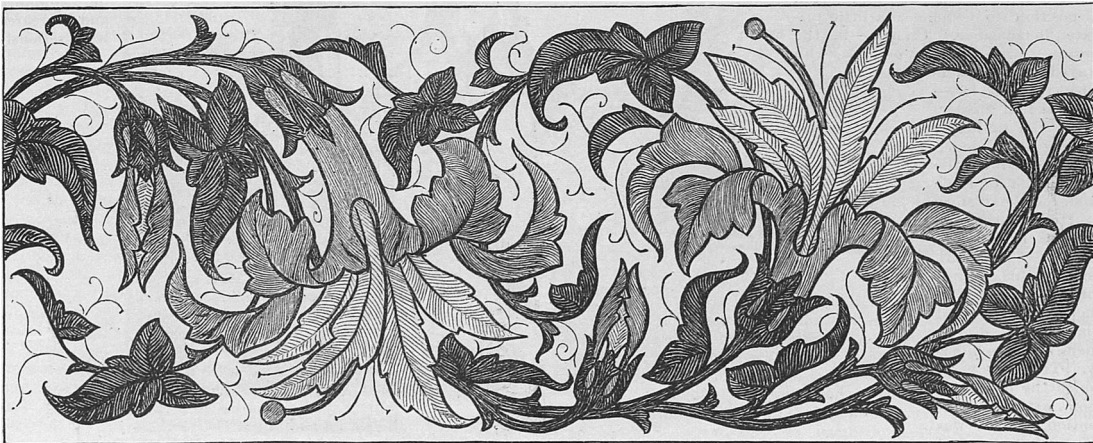
HOW A FAMOUS JAPANESE TREE IS CULTIVATED.

JAPANESE lacquer has been a familiar name to the entire civilized world for so many years that it is a matter of surprise to discover how little it is understood. Recourse to the ordinary books of reference does not repay the trouble, and only serves to give a greater realization of the prevailing ignorance. Exhibitions have shown the surface of articles from China and Japan of marvellous beauty and finish, and have afforded information in regard to their cost without being able to give the practical knowledge which an intelligent public demand. The little volume entitled 'Oriental,' printed for the use of visitors to the Walters galleries, has been for the last four years the most reliable source, and it stands alone to-day in the matter of exact information. The facilities afforded for a careful study of the artistic individuality in the choice collections of lacquer, to which the public have access in those galleries, bring enhanced interest to such facts as can be gleaned.

The rubs vernicifera, an evergreen tea, from which the lac or gum is obtained, is cultivated in every section of Japan. As long ago as the sixth century, an edict of the Emperor required every landowner to plant a certain proportion of his acreage with this lacquer tree, just as he was compelled to cultivate and maintain a certain number of mulberry trees, and but for this governmental support it is doubtful if the art, even then widely practised, would have attained its great perfection. Every tree, when tapped to obtain its gum, died in the course of two years. The amount obtained from a tree five years old seldom exceeded three ounces. In the mountainous districts the tree was of slower growth, and was permitted to grow for ten years before the gum was drained. The gum varied in quality according to the part of the tree which exuded it, that from the twigs being most esteemed and drying with superior hardness.

Among other uses in very remote periods lacquer served in finishing coffins, probably for ornamentation as much as because it rendered the wood impervious to moisture, but its everyday uses were those which gradually raised it more and more to a place among the arts. The gum, when applied to the prepared wood, can be prepared with either oil or water. Modern lacquers contain scarcely a trace of the true gum, and hence it comes that they do not possess either the enduring qualities or beauty of older work. True lac will not blister or peel from the wood, and does not change appearance from subjection to water or heat. The most conclusive test of this property was in 1873, when the steamer *Nile*, returning to Japan, with the specimens purchased for the Yeddo museum, foundered in twenty-five fathoms of water. Eighteen months after divers employed by the government recovered two hundred cases from the steamer, and the ancient lacquers were as perfect in joints, color and polish as when they left the hands of their makers.

It is worthy of note that although the woods most valued as a basis of lacquer work are not of kinds which have ever been esteemed valuable for their durability, yet, when imprisoned in the coatings of this gum, they have remained as sound for centuries as when first fashioned. And this is true of many specimens seven hundred years old, examples of which may be seen in the cases of the Walters galleries.



DESIGN FOR PANEL.